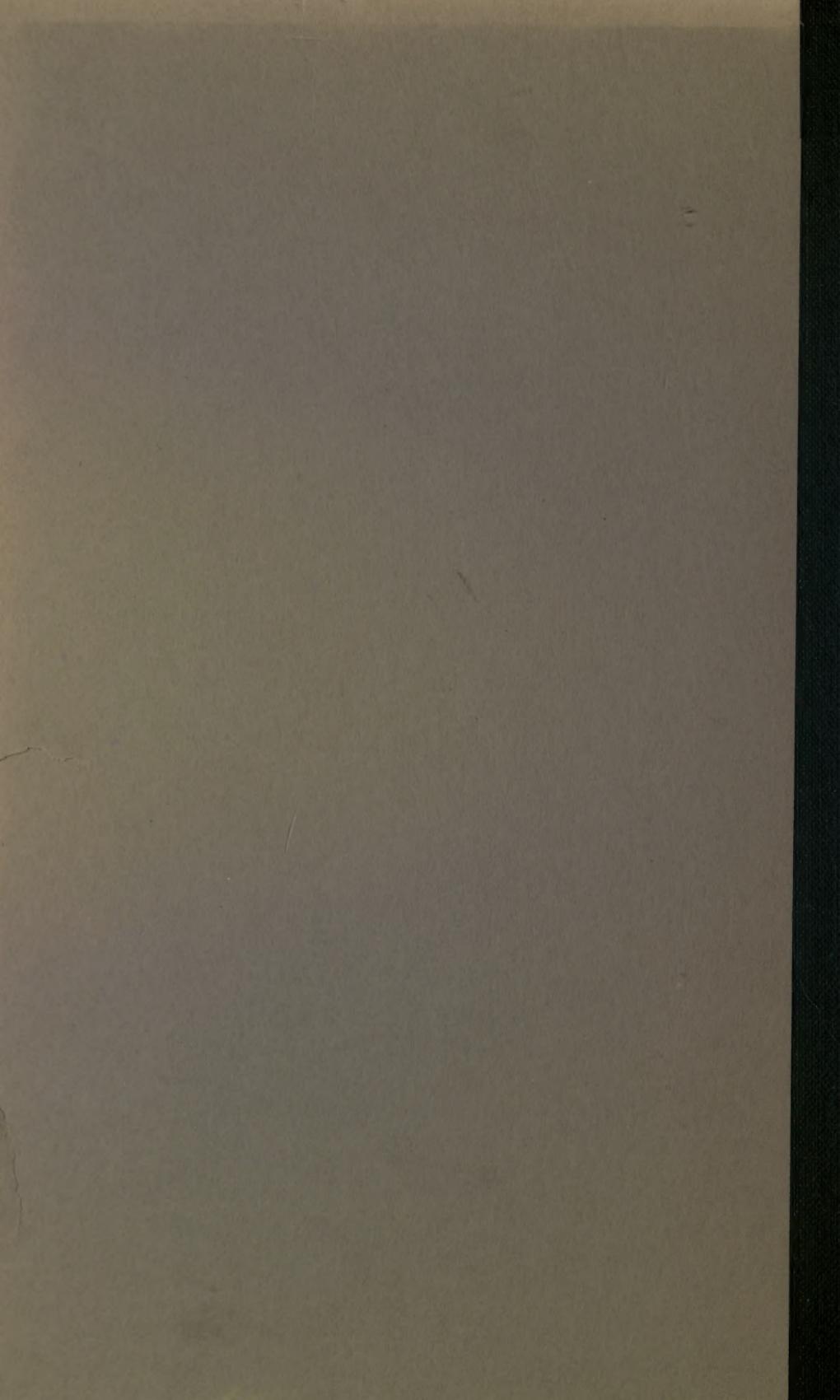


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[Miholjević, M A]
The Yugoslav question
with special regard to the
coasts of the Adriatic

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The Yugoslav Question with special regard to the Coasts of the Adriatic.

Zagreb 1919.

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The Gift of
Professor J. W. Mavor

The Yugoslav Question with special regard to the Coasts of the Adriatic.

I.

Almost immediately after the fall of the West Roman Empire the Slavs were not only on the mainland of the Peninsula of the Balkan, but on the whole Eastern coast of the Adriatic as well, forming at the same time an unbroken continuity with their northern brothers, the Chechs, the Poles, the Russians. This compact mass was broken up by the invasion of the Magyars in the 9th century from which time the separation of the Slavs — their greatest national misfortune — dates.

This fact may be taken as a proof that they lived here in compact masses during the Roman rule, though they were not known under the name of Slav. Had they found here during the invasion of the barbarians any nation (except the Roman colonists) of a stronger and more solid civilisation than their own, they would have mingled with them, and, as „barbarians“, lost themselves among them. This was namely the case with all „barbarians“ coming into contact with the Roman civilisation, i. e. with the compact masses of Roman population (Langobards and Venetae in Northern Italy, German Franks in Gaul, Slav tribes in Greece etc.). There

is no example in history where the barbarians overcame an old civilisation, in this case the Roman. On that principle the modern American nation is also being formed: the „invaders“ (as a rule labourers and men of lower culture) go to America and their children become true Americans speaking English. Such was the case on the Balkan. From the 7th century down we see the Croats and Serbs (mentioned as such in Const. Porphyrogenet's work) form lesser or bigger free states under their own rulers, župans, kings, tsars — while their north-western brothers, the Slovenes, who were and are spread over the whole of the Eastern Alps (Carinthia of the Middle Ages, now Carinthia, Carniola and Styria and North Istria), and a part of Italy lived in a sort of „autonomy“ under the „protectorate“ of the then most powerful state in Europe, the „Holy Roman Empire“.

The Slovenes in Italy — nearly 100.000 in number — live there under very hard national conditions, and there is no single case of their having italianized that part of Italy. On the contrary they have, through mingling with the Italians, formed a new race, the Friauls speaking a dialect (a mixture of Italian and Slovene) hardly or not at all understood by the true Italians.

The position of the Yugoslavs always was and is at once excellent and unlucky: excellent, because we had and have plenty of land and sea; unlucky, because we lived and live on the cross-way of the East and West, on a sphere, where, for centuries, foreign interest — German, Italian and Turkish — have come in contact and conflict. Hence we were always exposed to foreign interests, protectorates and even invasions.

When Venice became strong enough to think of the expansion, her first aspirations were to subject the coasts of the Adriatic. Partly by the romanizing influence of the

Roman Catholic Church, to which Croats and Serbs belong, and partly by the political aspirations of Venice, the whole Eastern coast of the Adriatic was for a time under the influence, protectorate and even rule of the Venetians. The eastern part of our people, the Serbs, who belong to the Greek Church, were equally under the influence of the East Roman Empire.

After the extinction of our national dynasties one part of Croatia came to form a sort of "union" with Hungary; while after the battle of Kossovo (1389) the whole of Serbia and the remaining part of Croatia (Bosnia) came under the Turkish rule. They remained so under different phases and forms up to the second half of the last century.

To save the „reliquiae reliquiarum", northern Croatia recognized and elected Ferdinand I. of Austria 1527 which the Hungarians also did.

So Croats came under Austria.

All this was the consequence of our unlucky geographical, and, consequently, political position.

II.

The consequences of foreign rules were evident soldiers, officials, merchants and adventurers from Germany, Italy and Turkey came, settled and, supported by their respective governments, began to give their national character to the regions they lived in. We find Italians on the coast, Germans in the northern Croatian garrisons and Turks in Bosnia and Serbia. The case of Bosnia deserves a special interest. As usual in similar conditions, the Bosnian nobility, to save its property, not only submitted itself to the new rulers, the Turks, but also largely adopted their religion, Muhamedanism, which was the only mark of Turkish „civilisation". So is to be understood

the strange fact that the Muhamedans in Bosnia not only call themselves, but were called by the Christians „Turks“ on account of their Turkish religion, though they never spoke Turkish.

The influence of the Latin civilisation was stronger: officials, officers, merchants who brought their families with them, were representatives of both the Venetian power and Italian civilisation, and tried to persuade the „barbarians“ of the lower degree of their civilisation when compared to that of the country which gave a Petrarca, a Dante, a Boccaccio to the world. Thus gradually there arose in the towns on the Adriatic, but only in towns, a class of rulers, colonists, mingled with the indigenous speculants, who spoke Italian, and declared themselves to be „Italians“. These were circumstances similar somewhat to those in England during the Norman French period, when „Jack would be a gentleman, if he could speak English!“ — The moral consequence of that state of things was that there sprang up numerous renegades who are still to be met with in some towns on the Adriatic, especially in Trieste, Rijeka (Fiume), Zadar (Zara), Pulj (Pola) etc.

But: notwithstanding all these invasions of foreign element on our territory there is no spot in the whole western part of Yugoslavia, viz., in Istria, Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Hercegovina and Montenegro where more than 10.000 foreigners can be found in a compact mass.

III.

After the Napoleonic wars Austria begins as a new state, which rises in power and political influence up to '48. The old principle of the Habsburgs: *Divide et impera* begins more vigorously than ever to show itself under the

most different pretexts: political „autonomy“ of provinces, crumbs of „cultural freedom“ etc. — but Germanisation and Centralisation were the political aims of the Court of Vienna.

There was no state in Europe in which the struggle between the Crown and the people were so evident as it was in Austria. It is sufficient to mention that, whenever Austria was at war, the true patriots of every one of its different nations wished her to be defeated, knowing well that after each defeat there would be more freedom at home.

Docet: '59 and '66.

After the latter year, the defeat of Austria by her old „friend“ and rival, Prussia, a new formation of the state sprang up. This was the famous dualism, in which the Court of Vienna with the Austrian Germans on the one side, and the representatives of the Magyar nobility on the other, formed a compromiss (the „Ausgleich“), by which they divided the power over the Slavs and other nations and thus formed Austria-Hungary.

„Divide et impera“ rejoices: the most serious opponents to the inner peace, the Magyars, were „converted“, and the Court of Vienna is again strengthened. A new element in the Austrian policy comes to power, the Magyars. After having sincerely and bravely fought against the German absolutism, they became now comparatively a free nation, and the name of Hungary began to rank proudly among the European states.

But at the moment they have received what they had fought for, they forgot their former submission and became to the various nationalities in their state what Austrians had been to them: oppressors and tyrants. Everything that had been „Hungarian“ became „Magyar“. Only the Hungarian Germans, being protected both by Austria

and Germany, enjoyed comparative freedom. But on the south of the river Drava there still lived the remains of the old Croatian state with which the old Hungaria had been from the 12th century in union. After having secured their position towards Austria, they tried to secure it also towards Croatia. And though a great majority of Croats were not willing to have anything to do with Hungary but claimed their own state in the federation of which new Austria should have been composed, the Magyars, supported by Vienna and Berlin, succeeded in forcing a compromiss with Croatia. Croatia was given a sort of autonomy in inner affairs, in national education and justice, but all other things, especially the finances, were left in the hands of the Magyars. The consequence was magyarisation and corruption on the one side (after the German method), and hatred of everything Magyar on the other. But being not strong enough for themselves, the Magyars became only tools in the hands of the Germans. On one side German servants, they became on the other oppressors of the Slavs. At home chauvins, abroad "freethinking" actors: before Europe liberals, at home olygarchs and tyrants. There were no means good enough in oppressing the nationalities. Against the Croats they sought their old and "natural" enemies — the Italians.

IV.

So the question of Riéka (Fiume) arose. As a consequence of the Austro-Hungarian "Ausgleich" Riéka was a kind of "condominium" between Croatia and Hungary, while in the compromiss between the latter two ('68) the question remained unsolved. When the new law had to be sanctioned by Francis Joseph I., the original document of the documents was so falsified that a bit of paper, the famous "krpitsa", was put over the original text stating that Riéka was a "Corpus Separatum

“Sacrae Coronae Hungaricae”! And this perfidious act was done in the XIXth century with the consent of the „guardian of the law” and without fear of European control! . . . So Rijeka became a sort of a colony of the strangest character: far from Hungary, on the Croatian Coastland, it was governed by a special Magyar „gouverneur”, had to send a delegate to the Parliament of Budapest and two to that of Zagreb. The latter was never done, because it never was permitted! But how give the city an inner mark of its being a Corpus Separatum? The Magyars were far (the first Magyar village lies some 350 kilometers from Rijeka!), the Croats were in an absolute majority in the city itself, while the environs of it were and are purely Croatian! ? . . .

But — the Italians were here, too! What would be more natural than to make them allies against the Croats? The „colonisation” began. Magyar officials overflowed the city. The regnicioli (the Italians from Italy) were given greatest privileges. Croatian schools were most severely prohibited, Croatian language persecuted, offices italianized and all inscriptions and signs put in Italian . . . Everybody who understood or spoke Italian was regarded as the purest Italian! In the course of 50 years there arose a new generation thoroughly educated in the Italian language, speaking their native Croatian only in the uncultivated local dialect. As Rijeka is the only commercial centre of this part of our coastland, the fortune-hunters invaded it from all sides, and seeing themselves sure and protected under the Italianity and persecuted as Croats, they also became „Italians” — the more so as they knew they were renegades. So is to be understood the curious fact that most of the names of the inhabitants, and especially those of the „political” leaders are Croatian. The characteristic feature of the

Slav (especially Yugoslav and Russian) patronimics ending in -ić (-ich) is, of course, nowhere to be found in Italy but almost exclusively at Fiume: Grossich, Petrich, Matcovitch, Stiglich, Bellassich, Baccich, Sikich, Blasich, Movich, Lukessich, Dorcich, Matessich, Stuppichich . . . and innumerable others! All these men are of Croatian origin and still speak Croatian at home, especially with servants. Officially and publicly they are „Italians“!

The best illustration of that fact gives the present mayor of Rijeka, Dr. Antonio Vio, jun., whose father, Dr. Ant. Vio, sen., mother, and brother Hamlet are Croats by birth, education and sentiment, while Signor Antonio (who allows himself in intimate company to be called Croat, and even calls himself so) is, as the representative of „Italian“ Fiume — an Italian of the purest blood.

Similar cases may be found in the towns of the „Küstenland“ and in Zadar (Zara).

*

The present policy of these elements? On the one side the Italian educated youth (most of them -ich) who enjoys in expressing its „patriotism“ in song, manifestations and cries of „Evviva Italia!“ — and on the other renegaded desperadoes who are afraid they would be punished by the Yugoslavs if Fiume got under them, for their betrayal of their own people, and try to deafen themselves and to stifle the remorse by also crying „Evviva Italia and Fiume Italiana!“ . . .

That is a thing the modern world cannot understand, and there are no similar examples to be found in the world, just as there were no political conditions similar to those in Austria!

V.

What, then, is the ethnographical picture of the Eastern Coast of the Adriatic?

If we take into consideration the provinces lying on the coast, viz, the so called Austrian Küstenland (Trieste, Goritsa, Gradishka, and Istria), further the Croatian Coastland and Dalmatia — which in the Italian public opinion form Italia Irredenta — we see that the towns lying on the western coast of Istria (Capodistria, Pirano, Parenzo, Cittanova, Rovigno, Dignano) are *de facto* and almost exclusively Italian, the farmers of the environs being Slavs; while Trieste, Goritsa, Gradishka, Pola, Riéka (Fiume) and Zadar (Zara) have a mixed population with exclusively Croatian environs. Though the official statistical data of both Austrian and Hungarian governments were not trustworthy and protected Italians and Germans against Slavs, yet it may most probably be said that the number of Italians, including here the Friauls, amounts in Istria, Goritsa-Gradishka and Trieste to about 25% of the population. In Dalmatia they form 2%, while in Croatia (i. e. Fiume, which *de jure* and *de facto* belongs to Croatia), if we estimate their number to about 15.000, they form only about 0'60%!

And whom shall the West Istrian Italians „belong“ to?

Let them sincerely and without anybody's intervention declare themselves, and we shall honour that declaration! . . .

VI.

The Demeanour of the Yugoslavs, especially of Croats during the world war.

The whole history of our nation on the Balkan was a defensive struggle against our aggressive neighbours: Venetians, Germans and Turks. As the latter were not so „routined“ in the execution of their political aims as

the former two, i. e. as they were cruel persecutors of everything that was not „moslim“, and the majority of our people were under their yoke, they were regarded as our national enemies par excellence. Our whole national traditional literature was full of songs of Kossovo, of Kralyevich (Prince) Marko. The principal point in these songs was: vengeance to the Turk! Therefore our people was more than convinced that we should be frée as soon as the Turks left Europe. One should have seen the enthusiasm of our whole nation during the Balkan war to be able to understand that sentiment. At the end of that war we were very near to that ideal, but for the agres-siveness of the German policy and the blindness of the old (so called) „protector“ of the Slavs — the Russian diplomacy! All our good neighbours were afraid we could not „enjoy“ the liberty. We, the only European barbarians, were not „ripe“ for freedom, and ought to remain under different protectorates, and in the spheres of different „interests“.

Then the great world war came! The free little Serbia was at once in its focus, and we, the Austrian Yugoslavs (Croats, Slovenes and Serbs) were compelled to fight against our own brothers! Compelled!?... Two of the strongest military powers of Europe, at the height of their strength, facing and „braving“ the whole world, and du-ring the longest period of the war — „victorious“!... But Austria knew well what a „confident“ element she had in her Yugoslavs, and, parallelly with the war on the fronts there began a war of such persecutions at home as a civilized man (not being, of course, German) could hardly understand! Our homes and farms were burnt and de-vasted by „our“ (Austrian and Magyar) troops, our garri-sons were full of Magyar soldiers, ready, at the slightest sign of discontent, to erase us from the face of the Earth!

The German Macht showed itself in full force over the Slav „slaves”...

And at the same time the perfidious Austrian government reported officially to the whole world the gallant „bravery” of its Croatian soldiers (there being understood the Austrian Serbs too), who fought heroically for their „beloved king” against „our” enemies! The Croatian troops could be found on all fronts from Verdun and Poland to Italy and Palestine, while the Yugoslav generals (e. g. Boroević, an Austrian Serb) were posted on the most important parts of the front... All this was to show the world clearly what a „true” and „enthusiastic” element Austria had in her Yugoslavs!

So the irony of fate (or, speaking more practically) the force of the German and Magyar canons and machine guns which stood behind our men) would have it that we were fighting against the French and the English and in „alliance” with the Turks! We were officially represented as the enemies of the Entente!...

The reverse of the medal?! How could we find means to show the world the true state of things? Yes, we were actually fighting against the nations from whom we at the same time expected rescue from the Austro-Magyar slavery. Who in Austria did not?... We were not even permitted to think. Every half-expressed thought was regarded as high treason and punished by bullet and gallows! We could not have anybody to tell our sentiments to. Officially we were enemies of France, England, and America, but one should have seen and counted all our men who were so lucky as not to be at home at the beginning of the war. On whose side were they? They were forming most enthusiastic legions to fight against their „own” state, against their hated

oppressors and tyrants. Those who fought in the Austrian army sought every opportunity to go over to the „enemy“ choosing the risk of being regarded as high traitors (leaving their families to most cruel persecutions) to fighting against those, who, they knew, were fighting and coming to bring us liberty! A few of our patriots who were able to take flight over the frontier had a hard task to persuade the Entente that we were not enemies, but unhappy sufferers! Yes, we were left to our feelings! And one should have seen our feelings, our happiness and joy at every victory of our „enemies“ to be able to understand us.

The immediate result of these feelings? — The proclamation of free Yugoslavia as soon as we could do it!

And Austria?

She immediately „recognized“ the new state, and so did the Magyars. Austria went even further: she ceded her whole naval force to Yugoslavia, but being true to herself she showed herself once more as Austria — she did not inform Italy nor the Entente of that fact. She expected a new war between Yugoslavia and Italy to repay her „beloved“ Croats for their „fidelity“ and heroism (the case of the „*Viribus Unitis*“!) The poisonous snake was killed, but the poison is still evaporating from the corpse of the beast . . .

VII.

Italy and Yugoslavia.

One of the principal ideas which were to justify the world war was rescuing and redemption of all enslaved nations. Was it not one of the chief reasons why Italy had left the famous Triple Alliance with which it was in a most unnatural union? It was an alliance of force directed against freedom, and commanded by the sword of

Berlin. Officially friends, they did not believe each other. There were many unsettled accounts between them. Characteristical is the observation of late Francis Joseph (it was circulating rather as a joke) when reported about the break of the war: „Verfluchte Preussen!“ — while Italy never forgot '66 and her aspirations on Italia Irredenta!

But then President Wilson came with his principle of selfdetermination of nations, and all the world took it as a basis for the future arrangement of the world. Italy, of course, also accepted his principles. And the war came to an end, in the way all oppressed nations wished. In accordance with these principles there arose the young state of Yugoslavia, full of confidence in justice and right!

But what happened? One of the conditions of the armistice was that the troops of the Entente should occupy parts of the territory of defeated Austria. At the moment the occupation had to begin Austria was no more and Yugoslavia stood here in her „stead“, but far from her policy. The „slaves“ of yesterday are free to-day. The occupation is being accomplished on a large part of the Yugoslav coastland. Italian troops form the majority of the occupying army . . . Far from making any prejudice to the final settlement of that question, I think I am allowed to remark, that the Italians declare to have come to occupy these parts in the name of Italy and behave in a way as if they were not only occupying but annexing them to the „Madre Patria“! The greater part of the public opinion of Italy speaks at the same time of Italia Irredenta including some parts of our territory where not a single Italian could be found. Italian papers write about us, especially Croats in the same way as Greek and Roman historians or the Chroniclers of the Middle Ages did

about the „barbarians“ of unknown countries! In their columns they print false statements and reports, especially those from Fiume, to be able to find pretensions to persuade the world of the necessity of subduing these barbarians unripe for liberty.

And why? If they have „claims“ here let them prove them by facts and not by the means which brought the German nation to its present condition! Let them understand the ideas prevailing now in the whole cultural world: ideas of peace, justice, love, true liberty, true equality and fraternity of nations. Let them understand that justice and right are above force, quite opposite to German „Macht über Recht“ and that to live at peace the first duty of every nation is to recognize the most elementary rights — the rights of language and nationality — to other nations too!

We have no „aspirations“, we have facts on our side. One fact is that Yugoslavia is ethnographically, geographically, economically, and, consequently, politically a UNITY. With the exception of the west Istrian coast, the whole territory of late Austria from Socha (Isonzo) and the Adriatic sea eastwards is peopled by one people, the Yugoslavs, who, it is true, have three names (Slovenes, Croats, Serbs), belong to three churches (Roman Catholic, Greek-Oriental, and Moslim), have, if you include the Arabian, three alphabets, but speak one language, feel themselves to be one, and find in Yugoslavia their national claims and ideals realized! As we are one at home we wish to be one also abroad, and to show ourselves worthy of the world's confidence. Therefore we do not and cannot understand how there could be anybody who does not comprehend such aspirations, and who is, consequently, in opposition to that natural

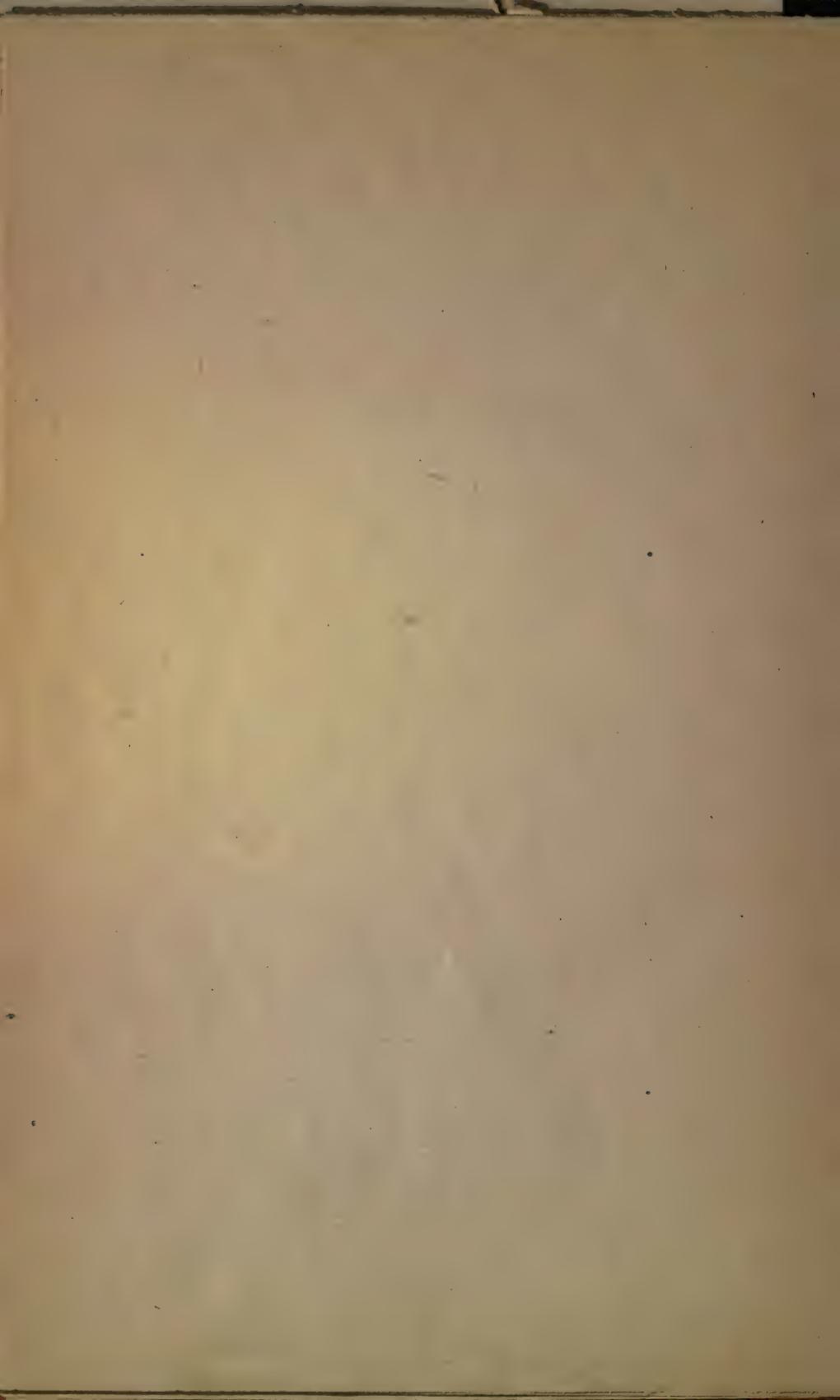
right of ours! We are not agressive, we only want ours, and leave to everybody what is his. The Italian ci siamo e ci resteremo — we can apply with better right: yes, here we are, in our beloved country where our ancestors lived for centuries, and here we shall remain to be the members of really civilized nations!

As such we cannot be enemies to the Italian people, but we are enemies of every agressive oppressor. We have suffered too much and too long to be chauvins and megalomans, and have, therefore, for such people only a smile of pity...

We firmly believe in true liberty, true equality, and true fraternity of nations, and are, consequently, not afraid for the future of Yugoslavia!

Bakar, December 8, 1918.

Prof. M. A. Miholjević.



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